

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

Piano Basics Foundation News

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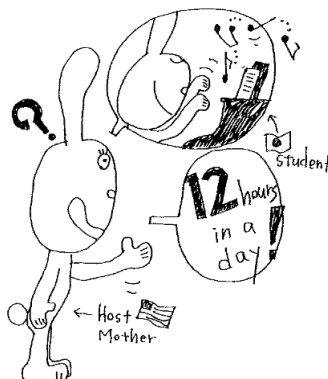
If We Do It, Then We Can Do It! ~ How Amazing It Is When We Decide for Ourselves “I’m Going to Do It!”

By Haruko Kataoka

Newsletter, Special Issue No. 10
September 25, 2009
Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg
Illustrations by Juri Kataoka

Four students accompanied by Matsumoto teachers traveled to two destinations in America - Atlanta, Georgia and Sacramento, California. Workshops were held there

for American teachers who are currently studying Suzuki Piano. The Americans had specifically invited us to bring students to perform in Friendship Concerts. Of course, it's natural for Japanese teachers to want to bring the students who practice diligently in order to show how wonderful Japanese children are.



However, in reality, it is not up to us teachers to pick which students would go. There are reasons that make it not feasible for some families. If children are too young, they will have to be accompanied by their mothers. The airfare is a considerable expense. So we encouraged anyone whose family circumstances made it possible for them to travel. Therefore, the students who ultimately got to go were a random selection of children.

Teachers at the workshop came from all over America (even from Europe). There were over fifty enthusiastic teachers in attendance.

(Continued on page 2)

On the first day, there was a 5-Piano Concert performed by approximately one hundred students from the Atlanta area. The children played quite well. I was happy to see children nurtured in such a positive way.



There was a rehearsal for the Friendship Concert the evening of the next day at five o'clock. It was evident that the very important basics that I have always talked about had been properly taught and nurtured in so many students in America. The final piece in the concert program was the third Chopin Scherzo. There were many other advanced pieces and therefore, advanced students.

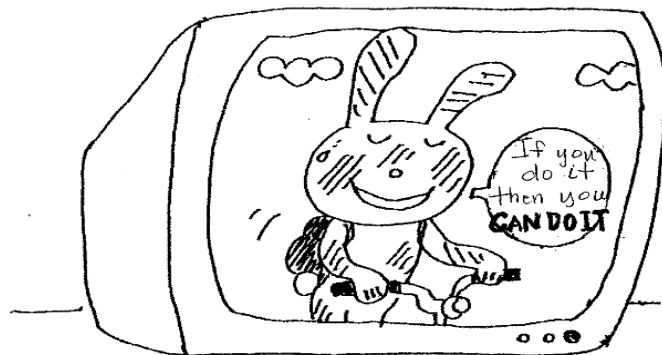
The older two of the Japanese students were impressed by how well the American students played. Motivated by this, they were determined to "do it" too.

One student had become lackadaisical about practicing by the time she was in middle school. However, I was approached by her homestay mother who noted, "At our house, she practices twelve hours a day," and asked, "Do all children in

Japan practice like this?" I had suspected that the other student, a sixth grader who started piano lessons when he was 3 years old, did not routinely practice on a daily basis. Although no one said anything to him about practicing, I was told that he too had been practicing well everyday at his homestay. Consequently, they both played unimaginably well.

I believe this was a wonderful experience for both of them. When you decide on your own to do something, you can truly do it! Furthermore, you can truly relish the well-deserved joy that results from successful achievement of a task.

As I was writing this article, there was a news telecast featuring a bicyclist who had just cycled from Hokkaido to Kagoshima, Kyushu all by himself. On the TV screen appeared a sixth grader who had taken this 35-day vacation. He was very dark, tanned by the sun, and looked strong and athletic. When the interviewer asked him what he learned from taking this trip, he replied, "If you do it, then you can do it." Exactly the same point that I have just made.



If you do it, then you can do it. Human beings are so wonderful! Any child, regardless of life circumstances, has possibility. In other words, every child is wonderful. Our trip to America was proof of this.

We always learn so much from children!

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About Haruko Kataoka Sensei:

Haruko Kataoka Sensei passed away at the age of seventy-six. As a teacher of the Matsumoto Talent Education Institute piano department, she dedicated approximately fifty years to the teaching of children as well as researching how to teach children.

Through her rich experiences and passionate dedication, a monthly newsletter was published in Japan for 13 years beginning in 1991. She faithfully wrote her column every month and gained popularity with the readers. This article *If We Do It, Then We Can Do It!* came from a newsletter issued August 28, 1992. Juri Kataoka has been the illustrator for the newsletter since the beginning. Reprints of the articles have been updated with her new illustrations.

Afterword By Keiko Ogiwara

Last summer, a 10-Piano Concert was held in Sacramento, California. Time flies, as this marks the sixth 10-Piano Concert held in Sacramento. Eleven students and three teachers participated from Japan. This was the first time that rehearsals were conducted with 10 grand pianos. I felt great enthusiasm for the concert from the American teachers. In addition, the TV and radio stations featured the children playing piano live. There was a great deal of media coverage.

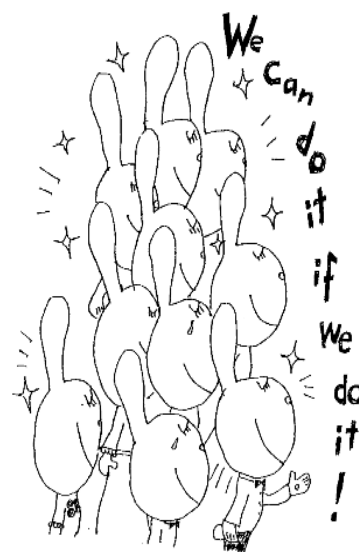
Rehearsals of all ten students on each piece were held over two short weeks. How to raise the pieces so they are music of a high level was quite a daunting task in this short time frame. Just the task of getting all ten students to play in unison takes

time. Though the concert was fast approaching, the pieces were not going well. Three days before the concert, one group was addressed by the conducting teacher, "I have a very sad announcement. If you continue to play this way, your group will be the worst group in the concert." Most of the students were in high school. I couldn't help but wonder how they were feeling and what they thought they could do.

On the day of the concert, this group of ten gathered backstage forming a circle and together confirmed and reviewed all the practice parts that they had been assigned. They especially focused on the most important and crucial spot, mouthing and breathing in unison. They continued up to the moment they had to go on stage.

This marked the first time they had taken initiative on their own without being told by a teacher. It appeared that the prospect of being the worst in the concert enabled them to rise up and improve on their own. As a result, their ten hearts played as one. Having exerted their entire innate strong energy, their performance was outstanding. Looking at them coming offstage, every single performer's satisfied face glowed with, "I did it!"

This summer, while participating in the 10-Piano Concert, they experienced, "We can do it, if we do it!" They gained a precious possession that cannot be bought with money and will be a part of them the rest of their lives.



Teaching in the Present

By Leah Brammer

Ever imagine having a whole new studio created out of what you have learned? The key is connecting your past studio experiences to your present work to span space and time. This is possible by creating an online environment.



Leah Brammer at the computer.

I left Atlanta to move to Silicon Valley in 2006. I packed up all of my musical belongings including 2 grand pianos, a huge file of music scores, books, a 600+ CD collection, stereo system, computer with all the files from my studio and the Atlanta Area Suzuki Piano Association newsletter/website, and boxes upon boxes of video and 8mm tapes. So, I had to ask, Does what I do only exist in one location and how can I evolve my teaching to be non-local? It was logical being in the Silicon Valley environment to look around and see that social networking was going to take off, and with it the possibility of ways to communicate and learn that previously did not exist. After many years of teaching I was not feeling like the new kid on the block, but rather hoping to see things in a time-less fashion. Thus began my quest to connect what I had captured on my video camera with some new way of learning that was non-local, and non-time dependent.

I began lessons online by exchanging YouTube videos with students that were uploaded for private viewing. At the time (2007-2008), it was only possible to upload about three minutes of video. Students would submit performances, and I would reply with a lesson. It was important to practice exactly what I was going to say/play before the video went on in order to get the most on the tape. I would then upload a lesson

consisting of a few three-minute segments that would refer to the video the student had sent me, give one main point, and give examples of how/what to practice. Organizing the lesson ahead and practicing it helped me understand how to teach and say less.

I also traveled back to Atlanta on a regular basis to teach my former students and others as well. I am grateful to the Atlanta teachers for hosting me in their homes, as it would not have been financially doable otherwise. This provided continuity with the online lessons I had with those students. I attempted to get good videos of the lessons in Atlanta, but was not proficient enough to really pull it all together. The idea was there, so I decided to upgrade my equipment, learn to use it better and keep trying.

Concurrently, I had taken a few students at my new home through referrals from other Suzuki teachers. My next big step was to do a website. First, I took all of my previous writings from newsletters and studio notes and uploaded them onto a blog. Then I made a video blog and began the arduous process of getting recordings off VHS and getting them uploaded. It was, however, a very interesting process to look back at performances and experience them fresh.

My web designer helped me link these two blogs to the website and put current photos on the website homepage. I thought that parents might not want their children's pictures on the homepage, but no one objected. In fact as it turns out they liked it, and love having the performances uploaded so they can share them with family and friends.



Twinkle group Fall 2010. Students left to right: Leah, Juliana, Sophia, Stella. Photo taken December 2010 by Christine Tan.

I began posting articles on my studio blog as a way of doing parent education, and provided links to the Piano Basics Site and other useful resources as well. I put a Google calendar on the website which I can easily update with the schedule. Having my website(1) on the internet helped me enroll a class of Twinkle students ages three to six.



Twinkle group started Fall 2009. Left to right: Joey, Erik, Max, and Jared. Photo taken Spring 2010 by Christine Tan.

Dr. Suzuki had his parents record lessons using a cassette tape. "Developing Children's Ability Using the Suzuki Teaching Method-How we are doing now" is an article taken from a talk given by Dr. Suzuki at the 1977 International Suzuki Conference. In that article Dr. Suzuki said:

I consider the invention of the cassette tape recorder as a revolutionary tool for music education ... Our children are supposed to attend their lesson with their own tape recorders so that they can tape the lesson and take the tape home for their practice. (2)

I put the lessons of the new Twinkle class on a separate video blog site for parents and teachers only. I decided to put the recorded lessons online rather than sending them home with the students for several reasons. First of all, putting the videos on the blog would make watching them appealing and fairly easy to view. Next, the parents could gain insight from watching other students' lessons. Also, it would be possible to track progress over time. Lastly, I had the idea that these lessons would be useful for teacher training and research.

By 2009 technology had changed so that I could upload somewhere around 10 minutes for each clip. So, I still had to cut lessons. I finished the year with all of the lessons, assignments and

recitals posted on a private access site. I have found these videos especially useful in helping parents with posture/technique, and the written blog allows me to say exactly what I intend. So, the parents benefitted from the video blog, but to my surprise didn't really see this as something radical or new.

This year (2010-2011) I have a new class of Twinklers and another Twinkle class blog. I found a video upload site(3) that enables me to upload videos of any length, so I can now upload the lessons without cutting them into parts.

Overall, recording the lessons has been an important part of making the lessons present and focused. Why would this be? The video makes everyone a little more aware, and in general makes the lesson feel important. I am amazed at the impact the online environment has had on the studio environment. Parents and students look forward to my uploading the recital videos. A parent in my studio has taken over the task of making wonderful photos of all the students.

The online access provides a means of experiencing the teaching-learning-performing cycle in a condensed aural/visual format that can span lengths of time and provide a unique perspective. Already I have performances of some students that range from age 4 through their high school graduation on the video blog that can be accessed by the student's name, and also by piece. With the new students it will be much easier to track progress as I upload everything as it happens.

The online lessons and performances also provide a means for reflection and perspective as a teacher. When I watch myself teach I can evaluate my effectiveness by how the child responded, and how the sound changed. This is so useful as a present-moment reflection and provides a history and a connection to the work that goes on over many years of teaching and learning. The significance of this change in the way teachers and students learn will be evident over time. First, we have to experience it.

I have been able to make changes in my new studio that were difficult to enact in my previous studio. For example, students come in groups for their individual lessons so that observation of other lessons is a natural part of each week's time in the studio. Since my studio is still small and

young, I perform regularly for the students so that they have a model. I have thus learned how natural and invaluable this is for the studio environment. So, these little changes are part of the bonus one gets from making a big change.

In his book *Journey Down the Kreisler Highway* Craig Timmerman writes about his move to another town after he returned from studying with Dr. Suzuki in Japan, and how it affected him:

It is such a wonderful aid in looking at things with fresh interest, It helps keep me in awe and wonder; discovering new things every day. Looking at normal and mundane things with fresh eyes makes life itself inspiring. Whether in the land of blue earth or blue

grass, a tree never stops changing; it is always growing. (4)

"The only constant is change," as the saying goes, and the change can take us to a deeper awareness of the constant: the basics.

Reference Notes

(1) Leah Brammer's website:

www.coresuzukipiano.net

(2) *Shinichi Suzuki: The Man and His Philosophy* by Evelyn Hermann, 1981, "Developing Children's Ability Using the Suzuki Teaching Method – How we are doing now," by Shinichi Suzuki 1977 p.207-208

(3) upload videos of any length: www.vimeo.com

(4) *Journey Down the Kreisler Highway* by Craig Timmerman, 1987, "The Real Constant" p. 70

Announcing **DEEPLY DISCOUNTED** Suzuki Piano Basics Starter Packs

For a limited time, Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation is pleased to offer its members Starter Packs for your students at a price even lower than our usual discounted price for materials. As usual, all materials are sent to Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation Members free of postage. We hope you can take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Starter Pack #1 \$50.00 CD's **Kataoka recordings of Books 1-3**
Books **Nurtured by Love, by Shinichi Suzuki**
Sensibility and Education, by Haruko Kataoka
How to Teach Beginners (Books 1-2), by Haruko Kataoka

Starter Pack #2 \$25.00 Books **Nurtured by Love, by Shinichi Suzuki**
Sensibility and Education, by Haruko Kataoka
How to Teach Beginners (Books 1-2), by Haruko Kataoka

Please use order form enclosed with this newsletter or contact Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, California 95831 g.nakagawa@comcast.net

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Focus and study

By Linda Nakagawa

Those of us who studied on a regular basis with Kataoka Sensei understand that the essence of music is tone; and that learning how to teach tone means that one must teach the basics. Intellectually, this is a simple statement and it sounds like an easy thing to do. When I first read Dr. Suzuki's articles and books *Nurtured by Love* and *Where Love is Deep* and Dr. Kataoka's articles and books *Thoughts on Suzuki Piano*, *My Thoughts on Piano Technique*, *Sensibility and Education*, and *How to Teach Piano*, I thought they were fascinating and refreshing. After observing them teaching students, hearing them speak, and listening to their students I became very intrigued.

The question was "how?" How did they teach so that one hundred percent of their students were able to play with good tone? One can easily come to the conclusion that the "Japanese students" are just high achievers or that Dr. Kataoka only taught students who were already dedicated. On the contrary, neither is true.

The only way to teach young children successfully is to teach with your heart and your body. I make this statement knowing that it doesn't really make sense. I make this statement knowing that I have not yet developed my own ability to teach in this way. However, I know it to be true. And there is only one truth. And I will never give up searching for that truth.

One must demonstrate constantly during the lesson. Many years ago, as I observed Kataoka Sensei teach I remember thinking, what does she mean by "move your fingers?" A group of us was huddled together during a break and I asked the question. One teacher confidently said, "You don't know what she means? She means, do this." And the teacher held out her hand and very stiffly moved

her finger. I just thought to myself, "I don't think that is what she means." We must use our bodies in the most natural way in order to make the most natural tone from the piano.

Let's not teach with our mouths. I remember Dr. Kataoka saying that Dr. Suzuki always would say that Suzuki teachers have an easy job because we just have to keep saying the same things. I am finding this to be true. However, now when I say 'move your fingers' my demonstration is much better than it was years ago, therefore my students can do it with greater ease, therefore my teaching is much better. And when I re-read Dr. Suzuki's and Dr. Kataoka's books, new, relevant meanings come to life. The basics remain the same, but grow deeper with study.

Teachers must continue to study. Fear is a motivating factor in life. Teachers' egos can be sensitive. It is much easier to stay at home and teach our students, or go out and teach other teachers' students privately. It is much more difficult to go to a workshop and have a lesson with a Japanese teacher for all who studied under Kataoka Sensei to observe. Let's turn this fear into something positive. Most everyone who continued to study with Kataoka Sensei has been humbled by their experience. Empathy is built into everyone who has seriously studied under her. Therefore, when it is your turn to have a lesson please remember that no one is laughing at you. Everyone wants you to improve; for if we improve, our students will improve and there is hope for the future. Let's stay on track. Let's not get distracted. Let's not resort to gimmicks and quick and easy fixes. Let's patiently continue studying in the way Kataoka Sensei taught us to teach. Let's do it for the sake of the children.

Attention Members

Dues for the calendar year 2011 are due and payable between now and March 1, 2011. ***As noted in the previous newsletter, by action of the General Membership Meeting in July, the fee for membership has been raised to \$45.*** As usual, we do not routinely send out separate bills to individuals, trusting our members to renew in time to appear in our annual directory. Please make checks payable to Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation and send to Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, CA 95831. Thank you for all your continued support!

Piano Basics Foundation

Upcoming Workshops/Events

February 10-14, 2011

Orange County, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops with
Keiko Kawamura & Keiko Ogiwara
Contact: Mei Ihara 714-997-8692
mihara@socal.rr.com

June 20-24, 2011

Louisville, Kentucky

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute
Contact: Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
<http://louisville.edu/music/suzukipiano>

February 17-21, 2011

Atlanta, Georgia

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops with
Keiko Kawamura & Keiko Ogiwara
Contact: Pam Smith 770-457-5144
pamela_n_smith@bellsouth.net

July 8-11, 2011

Tacoma, Washington

Suzuki Piano Basics Festival with Bruce Anderson
Contact: Jacki Block 253-759-7213
jblock@ups.edu

March 21-22, 2011

Phoenix, Arizona

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops with Karen Hagberg
Contact: Gloria Elliott 623-466-7447
gelliott50@aol.com

July 25-29, 2011

Saint Louis, Missouri

Suzuki Piano Basics Institute with
Joan Krzywicki and Libby Armour
Contact: Patty Eversole 314-837-1881
<http://stlsuzukipiano.tripod.com>
or Jo Anne Westerheide 314-644-0338
jmcwpianov@yahoo.com

March 23-24, 2011

Tucson, Arizona

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops with Karen Hagberg
Contact: Ann Taylor 520-881-5573
ann@anntaylorstudio.net

July 30-August 13, 2011

Davis, California

Mondavi Center for the Arts
International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert
Contact: Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

The events listed above are for the information of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members and others. Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation does not endorse, sanction, or sponsor events.

To add or change items on this list and on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact
Karen Hagberg (kh@hagbergsuzuki.com, 585-244-0490).

Kataoka Memorial Fund

After the death of Dr. Kataoka in 2004, many of our members generously contributed to a Memorial Fund that was set up specifically to further Dr. Kataoka's teaching. We were able to publish a second printing of her book *Sensibility and Education* with the money in the Memorial Fund. The cost of that printing was \$9,978, leaving a balance of \$3,380 to date in the Fund.

Soon we want to produce a new edition of Dr. Kataoka's book *How to Teach Beginners*, containing added chapters for pieces in Books 3 and 4. This project will require a comparable investment.

We encourage members to consider donating to the Memorial Fund again this year so that we may bring these writings to our teachers and their students' parents.

I'm sure I speak for all our members when I express gratitude to every contributor over the years. You have each played an important role in the work of the Foundation in our mission to preserve and disseminate Dr. Kataoka's teachings.

Karen Hagberg, President